

# **Meeting Minutes**

## **Natural Heritage Advisory Council**

**January 25, 2018**

Minutes Approved: March 19, 2018

Natural Resources Building  
1111 Washington Street SE  
Olympia, Washington 98504

**Council members present:** Peter Dunwiddie (Chair), Amanda Reed, Cheryl Schultz, Ian Sinks, Wendy Connally (WDFW), Sarah Gage (RCO), Heather Kapust (DOE) and Dale Mix (DNR). **Council members participating via phone:** Janelle Downs, Heida Diefenderfer, Becky Brown and Rob Fimbel (State Parks).

**Staff present:** John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Andrea Thorpe, Mark Reed, Machel Leal and Ben Guss. John Fleckenstein, Joe Rocchio and Tynan Gramm-Ranberg were present for portions of the meeting.

**Public:** Curt Soper, Executive Director, Chelan-Douglas Land Trust was present for portions of the meeting.

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:55 a.m. Council and staff introduced themselves, including Dale Mix, who is the acting manager of the Conservation, Recreation and Transaction Division of DNR while Brock Milliern serves in an acting capacity in another DNR position). Logistics and safety procedures were reviewed. No additions to the agenda were requested.
2. **Review and approval of October 2017 meeting minutes:** Minutes for the October 19, 2017 meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council were unanimously approved as presented (motion by Sinks, second by Reed).
3. **Acquisitions Report - Progress on past recommendations:** Mark Reed reported on conservation acquisitions activity since the last meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council (October 19, 2017). A copy of his report is attached to these minutes. During this reporting period, the Department closed on 6 properties totaling 292.7 acres with a total land value of \$3,263,500, using a combination of Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and Navy REPI funds. Four properties within the Stavis NRCA were acquired, one property within Schumacher Creek NAP was acquired and one property within Dabob Bay NRCA was acquired.

Reed also reported on the list of 2016 WWRP acquisition grants awarded to DNR as part of the capital budget. The list includes five natural areas acquisition grants, two riparian protection grants, and two urban wildlife grants.

Council members expressed an interest in visiting natural areas. Council and staff discussed how we might create such opportunities. Staff committed to distributing a map and list of sites along with the appropriate natural area manager contact information for each site. A link to the DNR recreation map, which includes many of DNR's natural areas, can also be provided.

4. **Consideration of the Natural Heritage Plan** - Gamon summarized key steps to-date in the development of the Natural Heritage Plan. He summarized past Council discussions as well as outreach efforts to the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust director and staff, board members of the Washington Association of Land Trusts, and King County natural areas staff and managers. Last October, the revised lists of species and ecosystems were presented to the council, after which the approved lists were posted to the Natural Heritage Program's web page. A draft Plan was distributed internally to a number of DNR staff for input. The draft was then posted to the council's web page and to the Natural Heritage Program web page. Gamon noted the extensive involvement of the council in shaping the plan, both conceptually and through edits.

Thorpe presented the current draft Plan for discussion and approval. She included summaries of individual council member comments, reviewed how the purpose of the Plan has been refined throughout the drafting process, and noted that some of the original concepts for this Plan might better be suited for a strategic plan or other Natural Heritage Program documents.

The Council recommended the following:

1. A cover letter from the Commissioner of Public Lands should be included in the document, and that the intended audience and the intended impact of the Plan should be addressed in that letter.
2. Staff should develop a Frequently Asked Questions page about the Plan, the Statewide System of Natural Areas, and both Natural Heritage and Natural Areas Programs and add it to the webpage.
3. Staff should provide source information/citation for the nomenclature and taxonomy of species and ecosystems included in the priority lists on the web.

As a separate discussion point, Council members requested that there be discussions about climate change, including if/how it should be included in prioritization of species and ecosystems, evaluation of sites, and management of natural areas.

**Council Action:** Chair Dunwiddie asked for a motion to approve the Plan. There was discussion regarding whether the Council would need to, or want to, review the draft Plan once changes from today's discussion were incorporated. It was moved (Reed) and seconded (Brown) that the Plan be approved, with changes made by staff based on today's discussion. Chair Dunwiddie stated that, based on the motion, the Council would not need to see the text again before it is presented to the Commissioner of Public Lands for final approval. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Update on Potential New Natural Areas** – Gamon briefed the council on the status of a potential new natural area adjacent to Steptoe Butte State Park. State Parks staff met with Gamon, Thorpe and Pavola to discuss future acquisition and designation options. State Parks will host a public meeting in February posing the question to the community about what values community members see with the potential expansion, and what designation is a best fit for the site. DNR will participate in the public meeting. State Parks may begin drafting a WWRP grant application, but they are currently uncertain which grant category it will be in; and DNR may also create a placeholder application.

A Natural Areas proposal for Steptoe Butte could possibly be ready for presentation to the council during the March meeting, or possibly June. Generally, a boundary hearing would be held following council review, however the grant application timeline might cause DNR to hold a local boundary hearing prior to the council discussion. Chair Dunwiddie stated his view that State Parks and DNR

natural areas are not equivalent designations, in terms of future management potential. Gamon reminded the council that State Parks does have Natural Area Preserve as a land-use designation category. Dunwiddie suggested State Parks has fewer resources to handle continual weed control. Connally added that designation as Natural Area would itself be helpful in the future when crafting a management plan to assure activities at the site are serving conservation. Council member Reed inquired about a partnership with a land trust. Gamon stated that all options are currently on the table.

Gamon discussed another potential Natural Area Preserve, at Wanapum. A consultant working for the Bureau of Land Management recently discovered a federally listed rare plant, *Spiranthes diluvialis* or Ute ladies'-tresses, in an artificial drainage from the hilltop power station. Kapust inquired about the need or desire to bring this boundary back to the council for additional review and recommendation to the new commissioner. Gamon noted the recommendation has sat long enough that DNR likely would need to have staff do additional field work concerning the status of the features in the original site design, and also to work with partners in the landscape.

- 6. Potential Natural Areas Acquisition and Management Grants for 2018 WWRP Grant Cycle** – Pavola presented the Natural Areas Program report that includes the potential list of 2018 WWRP grants for acquisition, state lands development, and state lands restoration. He reviewed the recently approved capital budget funding of grants from the 2016 WWRP project list, as well as the receipt of a DNR capital budget for Natural Areas of \$2 million. DNR is also requesting a supplemental operating budget enhancement of \$198,000 to fill a gap in funding associated with the late passage of the capital budget and also frozen federal funds through the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program. Kapust inquired about funding in the capital budget for the Trust Land Transfer Program. Pavola replied that the program was changed this biennium to complete funding for land acquisition related to the Blanchard Mountain State Forest. TLT funding of \$10 million will conclude an investment in replacement trust lands for acreage at Blanchard Mountain that has been designated as the "Harriet A. Spanel State Forest" for conservation and recreation management. Details of this land transfer and acquisition need to be worked out. The council discussed several of the potential projects on the "state lands restoration" list for 2018.

## **7. Agency Reports**

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – Connally reported that a search for a new director will begin soon. She also reported that as of now, there are 14-15 active acquisition proposals/projects, including some in eastern Washington, arising from Lands 2020 process.

Department of Ecology Report – Kapust acknowledged the critical importance of having a state capital budget for her programs. Staff who have been working on other projects are moving back to their typical positions. Fortunately, the WCC crews were largely taken care of due to fires around the nation where they were dispatched, and they now will be available for newly funded projects in Washington. The federal grants she administers at Ecology are all on review at Department of the Interior. If approved, Washington State will get six National Coastal Wetlands grants, which would be about 30% of the grant funding nationally. Council members offered observations of new directions at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Amanda Reed offered an invitation to have Kapust attend meetings of the Washington Association of Land Trusts.

Department of Natural Resources – Gamon noted that Dale Mix is the temporary acting Division Manager due to Brock Milliern currently serving as an acting Deputy Supervisor, a temporary assignment that Milliern suggested would be about three months long.

Recreation and Conservation Office – No report was provided.

State Parks – No report was provided.

8. **Natural Heritage Program** – Thorpe noted that with the pending retirement of John Fleckenstein as the program's zoologist, no funding is in place to fill the position. She is looking for available funding sources that may match program needs. Connally offered to facilitate a conversation with WDFW to identify shared priorities and to brainstorm ways in which the two agencies might cooperate to fill the gap left by Fleckenstein's retirement.

The council discussed the staffing situation. Diefenderfer offered a personal "statement for the record" about what seems like a seriously negative development of not filling this position. Thorpe and Pavola offered examples of the avenues they and DNR management have sought to maintain and grow program capacity and funding. Gamon added context regarding budget challenges elsewhere within DNR. Council member Reed noted that this conversation highlights a larger trend of budget challenges for natural resources agencies.

Thorpe also mentioned that the Program has a new Facebook page ("Washington Natural Heritage Program)." She encouraged council members to follow the program. The focus of the Facebook page will be to share the value of the program with the general public.

9. **Other Business** - Chair Dunwiddie noted that there is one current vacancy on the council and two that will open in June: his and that of council member Diefenderfer. Gamon indicated that he has received a couple of names to follow up for the vacant agricultural position on the council. Sinks said CLT is also looking at suggesting someone for the agriculture position. Dunwiddie asked if the vacant position could be filled before the June meeting, and encouraged it.

Chair Dunwiddie initiated additional discussion regarding visiting DNR Natural Areas, suggesting that council members may be able to add site visits as they travel around the state for other purposes. Gamon indicated that he would share this interest on behalf of council members with the Natural Areas managers. Dunwiddie requested a list of sites and staff. Pavola offered to send that to the council while also directing members to the DNR Recreation online map as a source of those Natural Areas that offer developed public access (parking, trails, etc.); and which may have a Discover Pass requirement. Council member Reed also suggested that DNR staff could send council members notices of their community outreach or management visits to sites with an offer to join in. Diefenderfer noted the importance of including legislative staff in such visits, in addition to legislators; and the value of council members connecting directly with DNR Natural Areas land managers for visits so that the council can be more effective in advancing the programs.

Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.